

The EU treaties in a nutshell

1. European countries agree to establish a European Union so that they can work together where they need to. Treaties set out what can be done at European level and how. They can be changed if everyone agrees. Any European state can join or leave. (*Articles 1, 48, 49, 50 TEU*)
2. The Union is based on the following principles: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and respect for minorities. It aims at promoting peace, its values, and its people's well-being. It treats all equally. Specific rights of citizens with respect to the Union are set down in a Charter. (*Articles 2, 3, 6 TEU*)
3. It is a Union of the citizens and states of Europe. Its decisions are taken as close as possible to the citizens. It respects its member's states' national identities, and the member states agree to help each other fulfil the Union's objectives. It works openly. (*Articles 4, 9 TEU and Protocols 1, 2*)
4. The Union has only the powers that member states give it. Member states act at EU level only when they need to. When they do act at that level, the laws agreed at EU level prevail over member states' laws. (*Article 4 TEU*)
5. The main institutions of the Union are: a Council with ministers from each state's government; a European Parliament with MEPs directly elected by citizens; a Commission with a president elected by Parliament and with members nominated by governments and confirmed by Parliament; and a Court with a judge appointed by each member state. There are other advisory and technical bodies. Each institution has a president, but there is no overall EU President. (*Articles 15-19 TEU and 223-307 TFEU*)
6. The leaders of the member states, meeting in the European Council and acting unanimously, set the Union's priorities. The Commission proposes EU laws and the Council decides on them, usually by a vote requiring a high majority (representing 65% of the population) and jointly with Parliament. Sensitive matters require unanimity in the Council. (*Articles 15-17 TEU*)
7. There is a single market, with free movement across the Union of people, goods, services and capital and common rules to protect consumers, workers and the environment. There can be common action in other areas where it makes sense to work together - notably aspects of transport, competition policy, employment, international trade, development aid, illegal immigration, asylum, fighting crime, agriculture and fisheries. (*Articles 7-222 TFEU*) In some areas, smaller groups of member states can act together if they choose. (*Article 20 TEU*)
8. Member states coordinate their economic policies. There is a single currency, the euro, for those who wish to participate and who meet the conditions. (*Article 119-135 TFEU*)
9. The Union has a budget which must balance. The budget is set each year by Parliament and Council, within the limits set in a Multiannual Framework agreed unanimously among the member states. (*Articles 310-316 TFEU*)
10. Member states seek to act together in foreign and defence policy, subject to unanimous agreement. When there is an agreed position, the Union can be represented externally by a Vice President of the Commission who is the EU's High Representative. (*Arts 23-46 TEU*)